

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 247667

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, UR, XF

SUBJECT: ISRAELI INTEREST IN SOVIET ATTITUDES TOWARD
MIDDLE EAST

1. SUMMARY. DURING CALL ON EUR DEP. ASST. SEC. ARMITAGE, DECEMBER 18, ISRAELI MINISTER-COUNSELOR SHOMRON AND COUNSELOR TOURGEMAN DISCUSSED SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD JEWISH EMIGRATION, RENEWAL OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL, GENEVA PEACE CONFERENCE AND PALESTINIAN QUESTION. END SUMMARY.

2. SHOMRON GAVE ISRAELI FIGURES FOR SOVIET JEWISH EMIGRATION: FROM DEC 1 UNTIL DEC 16 - 1350, WITH AN ESTIMATED TOTAL FOR DECEMBER OF 2700 AND AN ESTIMATED TOTAL FOR 1973 OF SLIGHTLY LESS THAN 34,000, I.E., SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 1972.

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3. IN RESPONSE TO SHOMRON'S QUERY, ARMITAGE SAID THE

CONTINUATION OF EMIGRATION DURING THE OCTOBER WAR UNDERLINED BREZHNEV'S INTENTION TO MAINTAIN HIS COMMITMENT. ARMITAGE SAID HE FORESAW CONTINUATION OF THIS POLICY IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE, BUT HE WOULD BE LOATH TO PREDICT SOVIET REACTION TO FINAL PASSAGE OF CONGRESSIONAL LEGISLATION. EMIGRATION FIGURES MIGHT WELL BE REDUCED BUT, IN ANY CASE, PASSAGE WOULD SURELY CAUSE SOVIET POLICY DEBATE ON EMIGRATION LEVEL.

4. SHOMRON REFERRED TO RUMOR THAT SOVIETS WERE CONSIDERING RENEWAL OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ON EVE OF OCTOBER WAR. HE DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF SUCH SOVIET INTENT SAYING THAT NO APPROACH HAD BEEN MADE AND GOI CONTINUED TO BELIEVE SOVIETS SHOULD TAKE INITIATIVE IN THIS REGARD SINCE THEY TOOK INITIATIVE IN BREAKING RELATIONS IN 1967.

5. SHOMRON ADDED THAT WHEN AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY PRESIDENT ROBERT HAWKE WAS RECENTLY IN MOSCOW HE HAD ARGUED THE CASE FOR SOVIET-ISRAELI RELATIONS WITH HIS HOST, SHELEPIN. SHELEPIN HAD DISCLAIMED ANY FOREIGN POLICY RESPONSIBILITY, BUT HAD GONE ON TO SAY AS LONG AS SOVIET UNION KEEPS REAPING GREAT DIVIDENDS WITH THE ARABS AND THE THIRD WORLD FOR ITS ANTI-ISRAELI POSITION, WHY SHOULD IT DILUTE THIS POSITION BY ESTABLISHING RELATIONS.

6. ISRAELI CONSELOR TOURGEMAN STATED THAT IF A RENEWAL OF RELATIONS WAS DESIRED, TIMING WAS NOW RIGHT FROM SOVIET STANDPOINT. RENEWAL WOULD ENHANCE SOVIET ROLE AT PEACE CONFERENCE AND COULD BE JUSTIFIED TO ARABS ON BASIS OF RECENTLY EXPANDED US ABILITY TO SPEAK WITH BOTH SIDES OF CONFLICT.

7. ARMITAGE NOTED SOVIET DESIRE TO PLAY A GREAT POWER ROLE IN MIDDLE EAST AS EVIDENCE THEIR GLOBAL POWER STATUS MIGHT PUSH THEM TOWARD RENEWAL OF RELATIONS BUT THERE WERE CLEARLY COUNTER PRESSURES AS WELL.

8. TOURGEMAN RAISED QUESTION OF SOVIET STANCE TOWARD EGYPTIAN AND SYRIAN PARTICIPATION AT PEACE CONFERENCE, QUESTIONED SOVIET INTEREST IN CONFERENCE, AND ASKED

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ABOUT SOVIET-PALESTINIAN CONTACTS.

9. LACKING DETAILED KNOWLEDGE OF SOVIET ACTIONS IN LAST FEW DAYS VIS-A-VIS THE EGYPTIANS AND SYRIANS, ARMITAGE SAID SOVIET RELUCTANCE TAKE PUBLIC STANCE ON COMPLICATED PALESTINIAN QUESTION INDICATED THEIR DESIRE RETAIN FLEXIBILITY AT THIS STAGE. ALL THAT SEEMED CLEAR WAS THAT SOVIETS WISHED PALESTINIAN SUPPORT TO GRAVITATE TO

SINGLE SPOKESMAN AND THAT SOVIETS WERE MAINTAINING CLOSE CONTACT WITH PALESTINIANS.

10. SHOMRON SUGGESTED SOVIETS MIGHT NOT KNOW WHAT BEST COURSE WOULD BE ON THIS MATTER.

11. ARMITAGE CONTINUED, SAYING SOVIETS HAD NOT ACCEPTED EXTREMIST PALESTINIAN POSITION. IF THEY HAD CAST THEIR LOT WITH EXTREMISTS, THIS WOULD SIGNAL LACK OF SOVIET INTEREST IN PEACE SETTLEMENT, BUT SOVIETS WERE LIKELY MORE INTERESTED IN SETTLEMENT THAN THEY HAD EVER BEEN DUE TO HIGH RISKS THEY SAW EVIDENCED AND FORETOLD DURING THE OCTOBER WAR.

12. TOURGEMAN ASKED IF THE SOVIETS FELT PEACE WOULD WEAKEN THEIR POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST. ARMITAGE SAID AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN HAD MADE JUST THIS POINT TO HIM IN A RECENT CONVERSATION. DOBRYNIN COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY ISRAEL DID NOT MOVE TOWARD PEACE SINCE THIS WOULD WEAKEN THE SOVIET UNION'S POSITION. BUT, ARMITAGE CONTINUED, WHILE SOVIETS WOULD GIVE UP SOME OF LEVERAGE STEMMING FROM VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THEIR MILITARY ASSISTANCE, THEY ALSO WOULD HAVE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC STRINGS IN THEIR BOW.

13. SHOMRON MENTIONED THAT HE WOULD RETURN TO HIS PREVIOUS POSITION IN THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE IN JERUSALEM IN MID-JANUARY. RUSH

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